

Transitioning from Traditional to Hybrid and Online Teaching

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I. Introduction: Traditional and Online Environments

The concept of moving the traditional classroom of desks, notebooks, pencils, and blackboard to an online forum of computers, software, and the Internet intimidates many teachers who are accustomed to the face-to-face interaction of the traditional classroom. In the past 10 years, online instruction has become extremely popular as is evident in the rise of online universities, such as University of Phoenix Online and Athabasca University (Canada), and on-campus universities offering online courses and degrees, such as Harvard University and University of Toronto. For many students who find it difficult to come to campus due to employment, family responsibilities, health issues, and other time constraints, online education is the only option.

Face-to-face teaching is a traditional view of teaching and is described as students and teacher meeting in a classroom at a specified time equipped with desks, blackboard, and so on with teacher/student and student/student interaction regularly taking place. Many students choose this option of learning because of the human interaction and the friendships that expand beyond the classroom. Teachers are in the traditional classroom for similar reasons such as the social interaction between teacher and students, the

relationships that arise, and seeing the joy and frustration in student faces as they are grasping new concepts. Moreover, students enroll in certain lectures based on teacher personality, popularity, and teaching style. Traditionally, face-to-face learning is often teacher-centered as demonstrated in the well-known adage of the teacher being the “sage on the stage.”

As an alternative to the traditional classroom, online teaching offers new, exciting opportunities to expand the learning environment. It is not meant to completely replace the face-to-face classroom. It is an innovative view of teaching and is defined as students and teacher meeting online synchronously and/or asynchronously equipped with computers, software, Internet access, and the technology skills to navigate the online classroom. Synchronous communication is termed as communication occurring at the same time; whereas asynchronous communication occurs at different times. Some courses are purely online, while campus-based courses supplemented with online teaching are called hybrid learning. It is important to recognize the difference between computer-assisted language learning (CALL; coined in the 1980's) and hybrid learning. CALL is using *computers* in the traditional classroom to aid in teaching; whereas hybrid learning is using *the Internet and its resources* in the traditional classroom. The focus of this paper is on the hybrid and online teaching environments.

Hannay and Newvine (2006) found in a recent study of undergraduate students at an American university enrolled in both traditional and online criminal justice courses that students preferred online courses to the traditional classroom; they claimed they learned more in these classes, spent more time on these classes, and found them to be more difficult and of higher quality than traditional classes. Although this research was conducted with students in criminal justice courses, the authors believe their findings are transferable to other disciplines. One theory of online

teaching is that it is more learner-centered than the face-to-face traditional classroom (Kassop, 2003). In an online course, the focus is more on the student than on the teacher. It is the student who keeps the class going through active discussion boards. In the author's experience with online learning, it was felt that the online classroom was about the students leading the discussions with the teacher acting as the "guide on the side"; in other words, the teacher is a facilitator.

It is hoped that this paper will alleviate the concerns of teachers who fear losing face-to-face interaction and encourage them to willingly investigate this new area of teaching: online. Also, it is important to realize that there is space for many types of classrooms (traditional, hybrid, and online) and that online teaching, rather than supplanting the traditional model, provides a new, additional, exciting space for teaching and learning. Technology worries many teachers who believe they do not have the skills to teach online using computers, programs, and language unfamiliar to them. This paper will explore the ever-expanding realm of online teaching, discuss the benefits and challenges of online teaching, and introduce new trends in online education. It is hoped that teachers can make use of their existing skills, gain confidence by increasing their technology skills for online teaching, and add to their repertoire of teaching experiences through practical resources provided in this paper.

II. Online Teaching in Japan

Article 18 of Japan's Basic Law on the Formation of an Advanced Information Telecommunications Network Society effective January 6, 2001 states that:

it is necessary to promote education and learning so that all people can utilize information and telecommunications technology, and to take

the required measures to develop creative human resources with expert knowledge or skills that will lay the foundations for the development of an advanced information and telecommunications network society.

This law reveals Japan's desire to produce world citizens knowledgeable in the growing field of information technology. It is believed that the field of online teaching and learning can bring Japan one step closer to achieving its goal of a networked society by keeping Japan connected to people and resources in other countries. Online teaching is a good solution to create a connected society and warrants further exploration through this paper.

III. Online Teaching: Challenges and Benefits

Online teaching offers both challenges and benefits to the language teacher. It is hoped that teachers realize that the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

a. Challenges

It is useful to review the challenges that lie ahead for teachers in the online world. A large disadvantage to online teaching is the loss of face-to-face classrooms and the social interaction this entails. Some teachers thoroughly enjoy being in the classroom where forming relationships with students is key in the course. Other teachers can handle the perceived seclusion and quiet of the online world. Also, there is a high rate of attrition in online courses; perhaps because students do not feel the necessity to attend or perform at a certain level as is expected in a traditional classroom, and other reasons are due to personal circumstances. Furthermore, online teaching tends to take up more preparation and feedback time compared to a traditional course. Another drawback is that online courses have the negative image of being easier than face-to-face courses due to fewer readings and

assignments. However, Hannay and Newvine (2006) found the opposite to be true; online courses were more demanding than traditional courses according to students. This created image of being easier depends solely on the teacher; it is the teacher who assigns the work and it is their job to give students what they deem to be an appropriate amount of work for a course.

The greatest challenge for the language teacher is understanding the technology and how to handle technology problems as they arise throughout the course. Teachers are trained to teach language and not technology; language teachers are not computer technicians. This is why it is essential for teachers to have appropriate technology knowledge and support before they embark on the world of online teaching. Teachers can acquire this knowledge from colleagues, other language teaching professionals in the field, and online teaching courses in which to improve their skills.

b. Benefits

There are numerous benefits to online teaching. First, it allows teachers to take a traditional face-to-face lesson and make it available online. Kassop (2003) claims there is great opportunity for faculty development and rejuvenation. He writes:

The thinking, planning, research, learning, and effort that goes into constructing and teaching an online course has rejuvenated many faculty members who were frankly going through the motions after numerous years of teaching the same courses, semester after semester, in the same classroom environment.

Another plus is that teachers can access their course at any time and at any place; online teaching is extremely convenient and flexible. Bisciglia and Monk-Turner (2002) found that online teaching gives teachers the ability to

remain current in their fields without having to travel long distances to do so. In other words, teachers can use online references for course materials and professional research. A further benefit is that once a teacher creates an online course, a framework is in place and only some tweaking may be necessary for the same course in the future. Online courses are also environmentally friendly with no excess paper waste because all sources are available online. Moreover, there is an increase in the quantity and quality of one-on-one interaction between teacher and student, and teacher feedback on assignments tends to be more extensive in online courses. Most online tests and quizzes provide immediate feedback to students; thus, lessening the teacher's time on corrections. A further asset to online teaching is that teachers can better monitor student learning through online discussion boards. A great benefit for students is that weaker students tend to speak up in an online environment; they are given a safe space in which to share their opinions. What may lack in a face-to-face classroom often is achieved in online courses.

Finally, the biggest strength in online teaching is that it gives the teacher technology skills that s/he would not have otherwise learned. Clark (1993) found that those teachers who preferred online teaching were those who were more familiar with the educational technology. Given the way teaching has changed over the years and in the years to come, it is most beneficial for teachers to be technology savvy; these skills will be extremely valuable for language teachers as more and more online teaching prospects arise. Many universities are incorporating online courses into their curricula due to the increased popularity of student desire to learn at one's own pace from the comfort of home.

IV. New Trends in Online Teaching

In order for teachers to delve into the world of online teaching, it is best to see what this entails. In this paper, many new teaching concepts, ideas, and activities are introduced with the intention that teachers enhance their campus-based teaching using online activities. It is hoped the teachers realize how hybrid learning lends itself easily to going solely online in the future since this seems to be the new trend in language education.

a. Webpage Design and Course Management Systems

For many teachers, the idea of creating a website is daunting, but it does not have to be. Using HTML code (hypertext mark-up language) is not necessary when creating a webpage. There are free programs, which allow users to make their own webpages without using HTML coding; the only knowledge one needs is basic word processing and layout skills. Yahoo! Geocities (www.geocities.yahoo.com) and Tripod (www.tripod.lycos.com) are two such programs. The created websites are saved and published on Geocities and Tripod servers. Also, for teachers with an existing server; e.g., a university or business server, Netscape Composer allows users to upload their designed pages onto the already existing server. With a website, teachers can post the course syllabus, upload handouts for students to download and print, post messages and homework assignments as well as record lectures or messages for students to hear.

Additionally, course management systems, such as Blackboard, WebCT and Moodle, provide many of the same benefits of a webpage within a pre-designed framework. Therefore, the teacher does not have to design the whole page, but simply select the pieces they want to appear on the course page.

b. Blogs & Yahoo Groups

In order for students to stay in touch outside of the face-to-face, hybrid, or online classroom, a blog or a Yahoo! Group is an answer. A blog (www.blogger.com/start) is a shortened version of the original term of *weblog* first coined in 1997. A blog is essentially an online journal or diary with comments posted in reverse chronological order. Yahoo! Groups (www.groups.yahoo.com) is similar to a blog where teachers and students post messages to the group with the added feature of teachers being able to upload files for students to download, all accessed from a website address designated to the user. In short, a blog or a Yahoo! Group is a simplified version of a course management system such as Blackboard or WebCT with the added benefit of being free. These programs increase outside-of-the-classroom interaction by building a stronger online community among students and teacher.

c. Real-time Communication

Synchronous, or real-time online, teaching can take place if properly arranged. The required equipment is a computer with Internet access, microphone, and speakers. Synchronous communication can easily work well in a hybrid teaching environment as shown in the example below. There are many programs that provide assistance in synchronous communication between teacher/student and student/student. Yahoo! Messenger (<http://messenger.yahoo.com>) and MSN Messenger (<http://get.live.com/messenger/overview>) are free downloadable programs. In order to download these two programs, it is required to have a Yahoo! or Hotmail/MSN login name which is attainable after signing up for an email address. Yahoo! Messenger and MSN Messenger are text and voice chat programs allowing one-on-one or conference communications. Another free downloadable program is Skype (www.skype).

com/helloagain.html), which offers free computer-to-computer calls and extremely low-priced computer-to-phone calls. Both callers need to have Skype downloaded onto their computers. PowerGramo (www.powergramo.com) can be downloaded to a Skype computer; thus, allowing the caller with PowerGramo to record both sides of the conversation. Both teachers and students can make use of this program by recording phone calls and reviewing them at a later time focusing on various language aspects such as openings, closings, keeping a conversation going, informal versus formal language and so on. The following example of in-class use of Skype and PowerGramo using the theme of phone interviews is adapted from an idea by Lori Richards (personal communication, August 5, 2006). First, the teacher introduces key language used in phone interviews, and then students practice with each other using Skype while recording their conversation using PowerGramo. Teachers can listen to the interviews and give feedback to students, and students can do peer and self-feedback after listening to the recordings. As a follow-up, students can do a final mock phone interview with the teacher using Skype and PowerGramo with the teacher giving final feedback.

d. Designing Interactive Web Activities

Web activities that allow for interaction to take place are key in language acquisition. Interactivity is what makes language real and alive. Wagner defines interaction as “reciprocal events requiring two objects and two actions” (1997, p. 20). Thus, we are presented with the image of student and web activity interacting with each other. Online interaction is self-paced, reflective, and gives students different types of voices in the classroom. Designing interactive web activities gives teachers innovative ways of introducing language to students; thus, accessing their different

learning styles.

HotPotatoes (www.halfbakedsoftware.com) is a free downloadable program that allows the user to employ a template to create a variety of quizzes (multiple-choice, short-answer, crossword, gap-fill, matching/ordering, jumbled sentence, etc.) to test reading or vocabulary comprehension. Each quiz provides immediate feedback. HotPotatoes exercises can then be put on a website. A similar program, Quia (www.quia.com) offers a 30-day free trial or paid annual subscription for users to create a large variety of quizzes and exercises (flashcards with sound, hangman, surveys, etc.) stored on Quia's website. Students need only access a website address to do the exercises. All exercises provide instant feedback.

Other interactive web activities include surveys, podcasts, and recording devices. SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) is a free website that allows members to create surveys using different question types (multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, check all that apply, essay, etc.). This is especially useful for teachers in creating mid- or end-of-semester course evaluations. SurveyMonkey will also tabulate all survey responses in the form of a table or chart for analysis. All surveys are stored on SurveyMonkey's website and are easily accessible with a website address designated to the user. Podcasts are multimedia files, such as audio or video, distributed over the Internet for playback on mobile devices or computers. First coined in 2004, *podcast* is a blending of the words *iPod* and *broadcasting*. Two free websites (www.podomatic.com and www.odeo.com) allow members to record themselves and post the podcast on the webpage designated to the user. Students can access the teacher's podcast, listen to the recording, answer a set of comprehension questions or leave a recorded comment to the teacher. Another idea is students can create their own podcast webpage for others to listen to and provide feedback. Finally, PureVoice

(www.cdmatech.com/products/purevoice.jsp) and Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) are free downloadable recording devices. PureVoice is the simpler of the two programs and can be attached to an email; whereas Audacity is a bit more complex, can be turned into an mp3 file, and added to a webpage. PureVoice cannot be turned into an mp3 file and therefore cannot be uploaded to a webpage.

e. WebQuests

WebQuests first appeared in 1997, and Dodge (2006) defines them as: inquiry-oriented activit[ies] in which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the Web. WebQuests are designed to use learners' time well, to focus on using information rather than looking for it, and to support learners' thinking at the levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

A WebQuest includes six steps: Introduction, Task, Process, Resources, Evaluation, and Conclusion. WebQuests incorporate real-life tasks, utilize student critical thinking skills, make use of student language and technology skills, and most importantly, put learning into student hands. Students are given a task and then make with it what they want. Students are able to use their creativity and problem-solving skills as they work collaboratively with classmates; thus, creating an ideal learning situation. Moreover, WebQuests greatly enhance any campus-based course by getting students out of the classroom and into the real world online.

Odell and Wally (2006) designed a fine example of a WebQuest about traveling abroad to an English-speaking country in which students work in groups of three. The real-life task is that students plan and execute a trip abroad. Each student focuses on a different country: England, Australia, or the United States. Students are required to find, print out, and fill in a visa

application form before their trip. During their trip, they send a postcard from the country using free e-cards. Also, they research the country in which they are traveling, and then upon their return home they do a collaborative PowerPoint presentation based on their trips. In this WebQuest, students work individually allowing them to work at their own pace, and at the end they work in a group giving them the opportunity to interact with others.

V. Conclusion

Online teaching is a growing trend in the world of language teaching and it is recommended that teachers be properly trained in online education before they embark on such a journey. If educated in online teaching, teachers will have more confidence and be able to focus more on their teaching than on the technology.

People may question whether teachers are essential in online teaching, and the answer is a resounding “yes.” We need trained educators to teach students language, culture, and at times, technology. TESOL, Inc. offers a *Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate* upon the completion of six courses to language educators in order to aid them in becoming better online language teachers.

Finally, it is important to realize that face-to-face instruction is not becoming obsolete; there should be no fear that it will be completely replaced by online instruction. There is room in language teaching for many kinds of classrooms whether they be traditional, hybrid, or online. Language teachers are not a dying breed. There will always be students who feel that the social interaction in the traditional classroom is key to education. But, it is hoped that teachers will challenge themselves in their own teaching, and seek ways to create hybrid classrooms as well as online classrooms

in keeping with new trends in language education.

VI. References

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Abstract

With the increased popularity of online language teaching, teachers need to take the leap and learn more about this growing area. Technology worries many teachers who believe they do not have the skills to teach online using computers, programs, and language unfamiliar to them. This paper explores the expanding realm of online teaching, discusses the challenges and benefits of online teaching, and introduces new trends in online education. It is hoped that teachers can make use of their existing skills, gain confidence by increasing their technology skills for online teaching, and add to their repertoire of teaching experiences through practical resources provided in this paper.